

The TIBETAN Plateau

A Journey in Western Sichuan & Tibet for Plant Enthusiasts

June 27–July 13, 2010

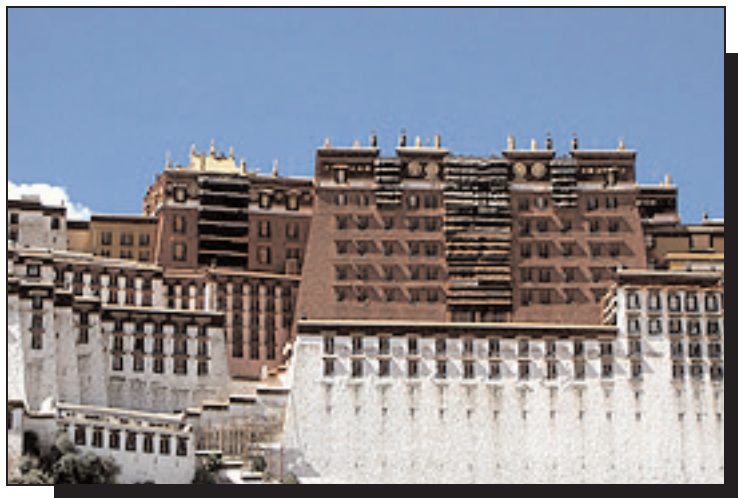
Dear Friends:

The **Tibetan Plateau** has for centuries been a place of fascination for Western naturalists and explorers. Expansive grasslands in the eastern part nurture some of the richest alpine plant communities in the world. High basins further west support domestic yak and timid herds of wild ungulates like Tibetan gazelle and their predators, the Tibetan wolf and snow leopard.

The Tibetan highlands—beyond the Himalaya range and west of Sichuan's panda country—form a resplendent tapestry of rolling hills, meadows, lakes surprisingly large and often a sky of deep blue with endless puffy clouds. Local people still accompany their herds of yak, camping in traditional tents of canvas and felt. Birders and plant enthusiasts tend to be well-rewarded for their efforts.

The vast meadows of the Tibetan Plateau support a wonderfully varied mix of grasses and wildflowers. The diverse community of grasses and sedges include members of the *Agropyron*, *Bromus*, *Carex*, *Kobresia*, and *Stipa* genera. Wildflowers include cinquefoils, gentians, louseworts, primroses, and poppies (*Meconopsis*). Willows and small-leaved rhododendrons inhabit moist spots in the meadows, and colorful alpine species such as *Arenaria*, *Androsace*, *Sausserrea*, and saxifrages occur in high, cold habitats on the plateau.

Our itinerary begins with an introduction to the fascinating city of **Chengdu** including the giant panda breeding center. We will then visit China's spectacular **Jiuzhaigou National Park**. We then begin our overland journey through the **eastern part of Tibet** (actually situated today in the Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Gansu and Qinghai). We will cross the Ruoergai grasslands and its extensive wetland areas, including a high elevation nature reserve that provides breeding habitat for Greylag Geese and rare Black-necked Cranes. We will make many stops for botanizing en route. We will also visit Labrang Monastery, an important center of Tibetan Buddhist Learning.



From Xining, we will take the overnight train across the Tibetan Plateau to **Lhasa, historic center of the Tibetan world** and currently the capital of the "Tibetan Autonomous Region." Lhasa has numerous sacred sites, each with distinctive esoteric rituals, colorful iconography and profound spiritual significance to the Tibetan people. These include **Jhorkang Temple**, a destination for pilgrims from all over Tibet, the **Potala**, winter palace of the Dalai Lama, and **Ganden Monastery** situated dramatically on a ridge that overlooks the upper reaches of the Lhasa Valley.



A Pacific Horticulture Tour



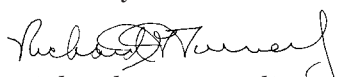
The Northwest Horticultural Society

As we explore the Lhasa Valley, we will travel north onto the high plateau and Namco Lake, one of Tibet's largest lakes situated in a basin at over 15,000 feet. Here the air is extraordinarily clear, providing extravagant views of glaciated peaks that encircle the basin. We will see wild flowers en route: beautiful rose-colored gentians and on the kora circuit at Namco lots of saxifrage and others.

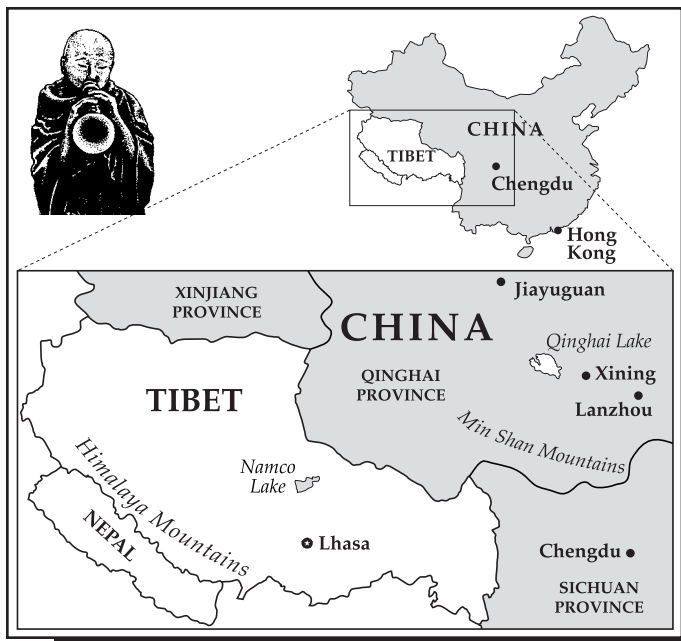
Although the Tibet Plateau is quite high, we have arranged the itinerary so that we will spend most of our time at moderate elevations, 11,000 to 12,000 feet. We anticipate that group members will be well-acclimatized. Our highest elevation overall is the pass that leads to Namco at 16,900 feet. Since we will cross the pass briefly in the course of a day's travel, we do not anticipate that this will present any altitude problems.

We sincerely hope you will be able to travel with us in Tibet in 2010! Joining us will be members of the Northwest Horticultural Society. Space is limited, so please let us know right away.

Sincerely,


Richard Turner, Editor
Pacific Horticultural


Greg Graves
The Northwest
Horticultural Society



ITINERARY

Days 1/2 — San Francisco to Hong Kong.

Depart from San Francisco's International Airport on Cathay Pacific Airways for Hong Kong, crossing the International Date Line en route.

Day 3 — Chengdu.

Arrive in Hong Kong this morning, and take a connecting flight to Chengdu. Transfer to the *City Garden Hotel*. Enjoy a walking tour along Chengdu's Fujiang River and welcome dinner.

Days 4/5 — Chengdu to Jiuzhaigou National Park.

This morning, we will visit the giant panda breeding center in Chengdu, one of the most important locations for panda breeding and conservation in Sichuan. After lunch, we will begin our journey with a flight to Chuanzhu in the Min Shan Mountains and visit China's spectacular Jiuzhaigou National Park. This UNESCO World Heritage site has remarkably clear lakes and an excellent system of boardwalks and buses for exploration. *Jiuzhaigou Hotel* (2 nights).

Day 6 — Ruorgai Grasslands.

This morning, we will drive from Jiuzhaigou to Ruorgai, ascending to the eastern rim of the Tibetan Plateau and crossing an important watershed divide from the catchment of the Yangtze to the Yellow River. This area has astonishingly beautiful, high elevation grassland landscapes. Along the way, we will visit the small Tibetan town of Sedi and enjoy a picnic lunch in the alpine grasslands as we explore the flora. Ruorgai is a newly refurbished city—buildings are brightly painted, but many people on the streets are traditional Tibetans from the grasslands in town to shop. *Sunshine Hotel* at Ruorgai.

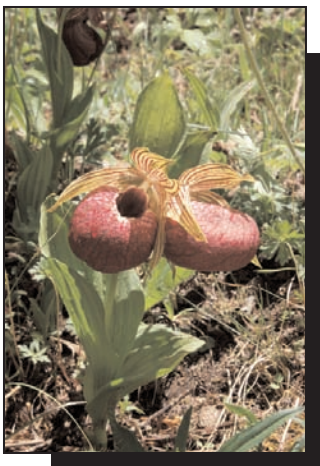


Day 7 — Hua Hu Lake to Hezuo.

Today we will traverse grasslands and small mountain ranges from Ruoergai to Hezuo with stops en route for plants of interest. Hua Hu Lake makes up part of the 1670 sq km Ruoergai National Wetland Reserve, set at 3400-3700 m (11,200-12,100 feet) elevation. It is important breeding habitat for black-necked cranes, and many other waterfowl; the lakeshore marshes are accessible by boardwalk. Kirti Monastery and Xiannu Valley in Langmusi provide good walking and a very scenic lunch stop. This evening we will stay in Hezuo, the county seat, in a very remote area of the Tibetan Plateau. *Shang Ba La Hotel, Hezuo.*

Day 8 — Labrang.

Descending from the grasslands to the valleys of Gansu, we enter an area where Muslims and Tibetans have lived side by side for many centuries. Our destination today is Labrang Monastery, one of the largest and most important monasteries in Eastern Tibet with about 600 monks. The complex includes several colleges that focus on subjects like philosophy and Tibetan medicine. We will spend the afternoon exploring the monastery in the company of one of the monks. Then take a walk in the Tibetan village of Ley-de near our hotel and climb a hill by a giant *thanka* wall to get photographs of the Labrang Monastery complex. *Labulang Hotel.*



Day 9 — Labrang & Xining.

Today we'll drive across high grasslands of Gansu Province which are ecologically distinct from those of Western Sichuan to Xining, capital city of Qinghai Province, via the Yellow River crossing. We will pass from a predominantly Tibetan to a Muslim region as the landscape changes from grassland to semi-arid steppe and arid river valley with wind eroded red sandstone formations in the valley of the Yellow River, and some picturesque villages. We may take an afternoon walk along old canals in Xunhua on the Yellow River and beside mud-walled homes of the Salar people. The Salar, unlike many of China's other Muslim people, trace their ancestry to the Middle East. Qinghai comprises the northeastern part of the Tibetan Plateau. Its capital Xining has long been an important trading center where Tibetan, Chinese and Turkic cultures intermingle. This evening, we will explore the Shuijin free market, in the vanishing remnants of the old Muslim part of town. *Qinghai Hotel.*

Day 10 — Pari Takster.

This morning we will visit the village of Pari Takster, which was the birthplace and original home of the 14th (current) Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama was born here in 1935 and was recognized as the Dalai Lama in 1940, when he was four and one-half years old. He became the leader of the Tibetan government in exile in 1959 when he and many followers fled after a failed revolt against the Chinese. A widely respected figure worldwide, he was awarded the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize. We will

Flora of Tibet

Our visit to Tibet offers superb opportunities to botanize: the Greater Himalayan Region (including Tibet) supports one of the most diverse alpine floras on earth. Expansive meadows in the east provide habitat for dozens of forb species. Many of these will be in flower by June, and if the season is favorable, some may color the landscape.

The region we will cross is a center of diversity for genera such as Primula (primrose) whose globular clusters of flowers are borne at the end of a long scape, Pedicularis (lousewort) whose intricate floral architecture probably limits pollination to certain insect species, and Meeboldia, the renowned Himalayan blue poppy. Hill slopes of the eastern river valleys support many Rhododendron species, with smaller, often fragrant alpine Rhododendron in the high meadows as well.

In Lhasa Valley and the surrounding mountains, landscapes are drier and rockier. We may spot tufts of Saussurea, known locally as "snow lotus," and Corydalis, a colorful genus of rock gardens and scree slopes. Tiny saxifrages and cushion plants of Arenaria grow in the highest, windiest locales.

Bring your close-up lens and be prepared for many rewarding sessions on your hands and knees, sampling the Himalayan biodiversity, first hand.

return to Xining for an afternoon at leisure. Then we board the *overnight train to Lhasa*. Accommodations in soft sleepers on the train.

Day 11 — Tibetan Plateau to Lhasa.

Today we will journey by train across the Tibetan Plateau to Lhasa. This train route was recently completed—and was long sought after by the Chinese as a way to tie Tibet more closely to China. We'll enjoy seeing the vast landscapes and grasslands en route to Lhasa. *Kyichu Hotel (5 nights)*.

Days 12/14 — Lhasa.

We will explore Lhasa for the next three days. Our visits will include the majestic Potala, former winter palace of the Dalai Lama, and Norbulinka, his summer palace. There will be time in the late afternoon to explore Barkhor, the fascinating old section of Lhasa, and Jorkang Temple, the ultimate destination for pilgrims who visit Lhasa from all over the Tibetan world. Depending on the monastery schedules, we may visit Sera or Drepung, important spiritual centers near Lhasa. On our third day in Lhasa Valley, we will venture out to Ganden Monastery set on a ridge top in the mountains to the east of the city. In the Lhasa valley, the Tibetan people still practice traditional farming methods. En route to these monasteries, we will have superb opportunities to see the life and flora of the Tibetan countryside.



Day 15 — Namco Lake.

Morning drive northward out of Lhasa Valley to the high Tibetan Plateau. We will traverse extensive grasslands along the Qinghai-Lhasa Highway, then cross a pass at nearly 17,000 feet to spectacular Namco Lake. This lake is situated at 15,500 feet elevation, covers many hundreds of square miles and is encircled by grasslands and the glaciated snow mountains of the Nyenchen Tanghla. See wild flowers at the high pass, beautiful rose-colored gentians and on the kora circuit at Namco lots of Saxifrage and others. En route, we will enjoy a picnic lunch on the grasslands and may have the opportunity to visit a family of seasonal nomads.

Days 16/17 — Lhasa to Chengdu & home.

Take flight to Chengdu and overnight at the *City Garden Hotel*. Farewell dinner in celebration of our journey. Enjoy the Sichuan Opera this evening. Fly to Hong Kong and San Francisco, arriving on the same day.



RESPONSIBILITY

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Map by April Milne.

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More Notes on the Flora of Tibet

Grasslands of the Amdo region, the northeastern part of the Tibet Plateau which lies in the Chinese Provinces of Gansu and Qinghai, are floristically diverse. The areas we'll traverse range in elevation from 10,000 to 12,000 feet and the habitat supports numerous forb species that flower in summer. On our past visits to this area, we have identified numerous species of *Pedicularis* (lousewort), a genus whose floral morphology appears tightly co-evolved to its insect pollinators. The variation in flower morphology and color within this group, whose center of diversity lies within the eastern Himalayan region, is quite remarkable.

Other diverse genera of the Amdo region that may be of special interest to plant enthusiasts include *Primula* (primrose), which favors wetland areas and forest clearings and *Saussurea*, a composite with thistle-like rosettes at subalpine elevations, and curious tufted-forms in the high alpine periglacial environments. Known as "snow-lotus," the tufted species of *Saussurea* are widely collected in China for their putative medicinal properties. All of these taxa seem well adapted to the high grazing pressure that occurs in many areas, especially now that economic reforms have encouraged a higher density of livestock (mostly yak-cattle hybrids) in the grassland areas.

Rocky slopes at higher elevations support cushion plants in windy locations that hold the stable soils these slow growing plants require. The more widespread cushion plants of the Tibetan Plateau include species of *Arenaria*, *Androsace*, and *Saxifraga*. Less stable scree slopes and areas prone to freeze-thaw driven soil solifluction support small, stoloniferous alpiners like *Corydalis spp.*, and tiny, fleshy stemmed crucifers. Some of the saxifrages with their bright red stolons are also well-adapted to the creeping soils common at high elevation. *Silene* is also seen in the higher alpine areas; some species have hyper-inflated calyx lobes that give the inflorescence a balloon-like appearance. Gentians, including some large, showy species, are common in many places on the Plateau; sandy areas have procumbant legumes such as *Astragalus* and *Oxytropis spp.*

Several species of *Leontopodium* (edelweiss) also occur in the rocky, high elevation areas. Ground orchids occur in some areas, including *Dactylorhiza*, *Spiranthes*, and *Cypripedium* (lady-slippers).

While the Tibet Plateau is too cold and arid to support much forest, there are stands of poplar and willow along the Yarlung Tsangpo River, and well developed forests of spruce and fir in the eastern valleys. Here during summer, we may see numerous shrub rhododendrons in bloom. Iris and wild peony are sometimes associated with these forest types, as well as some saprophytic taxa like *Oronbanche*.

Braided streams of the Lhasa valley support shrubberies of *Hippophae* (sea buckthorn) whose berries are said to be very high in vitamin C, and *Myricaria* which is a locally common member of the tamarisk family.



RESERVATIONS

#1125

Yes! I/we want to join the **Tibetan Plateau Expedition, June 27–July 13, 2010.** Please reserve _____ space(s). As a deposit, I/we enclose a check for \$ _____ (\$500 per person) payable to Betchart Expeditions Inc. Trust Account.

Name(s) _____ Age _____

_____ Age _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone: Home (_____) _____

Work (_____) _____

Email Address _____

Membership *Pacific Horticulture*: Yes No

Northwest Horticulture Society: Yes No

Accommodations Preference:

Twin Single Twin Share with a friend *or*
 Twin Share assign a roommate
 Nonsmoker Smoker

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Please Mail To: **Tibetan Plateau Expedition**
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17050 Montebello Road
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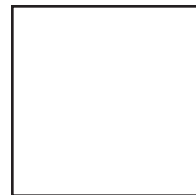


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FIRST CLASS



Discover TIBET! . . .

Explore the Tibetan Plateau
from Western Sichuan to Lhasa!
June 27–July 13, 2010

COSTS & CONDITIONS

Tibet Trip Fee: \$4,395 per person twin share + air fare of approximately \$1,495 + fuel surcharge + tax San Francisco to Chengdu, China, RT, and in-tour flights \$695 per person.

Questions: Please call **Betchart Expeditions Inc.**, (800) 252-4910 or (408) 252-4910.

Expedition Fee Includes: Land transport; airport transfers; accommodations; all meals in Sichuan and Tibet; tips to drivers and local guides; entrance fees; baggage handling; leadership, administration; \$300 per person contribution (\$150 each to Pacific Horticulture and the Northwest Horticultural Society).

Expedition Fee Does Not Include: International air fare (quoted separately); in-tour flights; China visa fee; gratuities to leaders; personal items such as laundry, phone calls, alcoholic beverages, snacks; personal insurance; or foreign airport departure taxes.

What to Expect: This expedition is planned for travelers who would enjoy exploring the flora, cultural heritage, and natural history of Tibet, from the grasslands of the Eastern Tibetan Plateau to the Tibet heartland around Lhasa. Leading the expedition will be an excellent naturalist and knowledgeable guide. The group will travel 4 to 7 hours by bus or van on each of several days. On traveling days, we will take time for both planned and spontaneous stops to walk, photograph, and talk with local people. Walks will be at a leisurely pace suitable for discovery; binoculars are suggested.

Weather is pleasant in Tibet during the summer with midday temperatures in the 70s to upper 80s and some rain. Our itinerary starts in the lower eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau where we will reach elevations of 12,500 feet. We will acclimatize as we drive from lower to higher elevations. Around Lhasa, we will stay no higher than 12,000 feet, and

will drive over one 16,900 foot pass. Most nights will be spent between 11,000-12,000 feet. This expedition will be a tremendous experience for travelers with an appetite for adventure who would enjoy a chance to explore rich cultural and natural areas on the Tibetan Plateau. Please be flexible concerning time schedules, hotels, food, bumpy roads, and mechanical breakdowns. With this in mind, we will have a grand adventure of discovery. (No smoking in vehicles, during lectures, or meals, please.)

Air Fare & Airline Ticketing: International flights are on Cathay Pacific Airways. Please phone *Betchart Expeditions*, (800) 252-4910 for further information. AIR FARES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

Accommodations: Are in comfortable and reasonably clean Chinese and Tibetan hotels based on twin share. Expect a good bed, showers, Western style toilets, and carefully prepared food. A couple of hotels are modest, but are the best available for small towns not accustomed to western visitors. On the overnight train to Lhasa, we will be in soft sleepers, four to a compartment with share bathroom facilities. Between hotels, some Asian toilets or bush toilets may be available (some "clean" and some not). Single accommodations are available for a supplement of \$795 (no singles are available on the train).

Reservations, Deposits & Payments: To reserve a place on this expedition, please mail a deposit of \$500 per person with the completed reservation form to: **Tibet Expedition, Betchart Expeditions Inc., 17050 Montebello Road, Cupertino, CA 95014-5435.** Balance of land fee is due 60 days before departure.

Cancellations & Refunds: The initial deposit is refundable up to 60 days before departure less a handling fee of \$100 per person. There is no refund after the 60-day period unless your place is resold, then only the \$100 per person handling fee is withheld. There are no refunds for unused meals or other expedition features.